

# VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

DECEMBER 2011

FOUR DOLLARS



Making the Case Stick • Wild in the City • In Search of Bushytails



DECEMBER

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# ER 2011 CONTENTS



## 5 The Bear Facts

by Clarke C. Jones

When it comes to enforcing wildlife laws, expert knowledge of biology and animal behavior can make the difference in court.

## 8 Saving A Mountaintop Species

by Gail Brown

In their efforts to conserve a rare salamander, researchers hope the habitats at Virginia's highest elevations will also benefit.

## 12 Play it Forward

by Tim Thornton

In Botetourt County, a prime piece of real estate has been protected for the benefit of wildlife, hunters, farmers, and oh yes, school children.

## 16 Take an Adult Squirrel Hunting

by Bruce Ingram

The fall and June squirrel seasons make for opportune times to mentor someone interested in taking up hunting.



## 20 Incident Off The Wash Flats

by Travis McDaniel

Memories of a northeaster that hit Back Bay's popular wildlife refuge inspire this tale of courage and determination.

## 24 Wild In The City

by Suzanne Ramsey

In many cities and urban areas, wildlife is moving about right under our noses—even if we don't always catch a glimpse.



©Maslowski Photo

## 28 AFIELD AND AFLOAT

32 Off the Leash • 33 Photo Tips • 34 Dining In • 35 2011 Index

ABOUT THE COVER: Gray squirrel. Story on page 16. © Bill Lea



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Thanks to the support of sportsmen and women of Virginia through hunting license sales and matching federal dollars, our Department owns 39 wildlife management areas (WMAs) encompassing more than 203,000 acres. Located across the Old Dominion, these properties provide public access for wildlife-related recreation. Not unlike many other state wildlife agencies, what we had been missing until recently was reliable information about who actually uses our WMAs and how they feel about our management practices.

In 2009, our staff began working with researchers at Virginia Tech to complete a study of WMA users. More than 4,000 face-to-face interviews were conducted to glean public input on our management principles and goals for these important wildlife areas. Focus group meetings were followed by workshops held statewide. Goals were then drafted and made available for public comment, and 128 folks took time to share their thoughts.

Several things are apparent from this public input. WMA users support and enjoy our network of public lands. Visitation ranged from over 15,000 recreational use days (measuring number of visitors/day) at our Chickahominy WMA to nearly 10,000 days at the George Thompson WMA. The Chickahominy features a very popular sighting-in range, while G. Thompson displays a notable population of wildflowers that attract waves of visitors each spring. Overall satisfaction with our wildlife management areas is quite high, and it is interesting that the use of these areas is fairly diverse. The biggest single use of WMAs—hunting—came in at 26 percent of those surveyed. Thirty percent utilize the sighting-in ranges available at 6 WMAs, 14 percent fish at WMAs, and the remaining 30 percent visit to enjoy a range of activities, from wildlife watching to hiking.

When asked, about half of those surveyed support the concept of paying to access these properties. That validates the board's recent action to adopt an access fee, or a means by which those who enjoy the WMAs but don't buy a hunting, fishing, or trapping license, or have a registered boat can in fact contribute to the cost of maintaining these wonderful public spaces. That access fee goes into effect on January 1, 2012 and can be purchased as a daily or annual pass.

Another important finding of the study: Most people understand and appreciate the management practices required to create or maintain forest, farm, and wetlands habitats that support healthy wildlife populations. Nearly three-quarters of survey respondents support active timber management to improve habitats and about the same number support the use of prescribed burns (not wildfire) to reduce fuel loads or to encourage and stimulate the growth of desired vegetation.

With eight million citizens now calling our great commonwealth home, WMAs will become increasingly indispensable as places where folks can connect with wildlife. I applaud our staff and Virginia Tech researchers for taking a scientific approach to gathering data from which to develop goals and principles for managing these areas. It's not all that surprising to me, but it sure feels good to have approached it the right way.

## MISSION STATEMENT

To manage Virginia's wildlife and inland fish to maintain optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; To provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation and to work diligently to safeguard the rights of the people to hunt, fish and harvest game as provided for in the Constitution of Virginia; To promote safety for persons and property in connection with boating, hunting and fishing; To provide educational outreach programs and materials that foster an awareness of and appreciation for Virginia's fish and wildlife resources, their habitats, and hunting, fishing, and boating opportunities.

Dedicated to the Conservation of Virginia's Wildlife and Natural Resources

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A black bear and its cub are shown in a forest. The adult bear is on the right, looking left, with a small white patch on its chest. The cub is on the left, climbing a tree trunk. The background is a lush green forest.

# THE BEAR FACTS

*On the Front Lines  
of Law Enforcement*





by Clarke C. Jones

It was 1:30 in the morning. On a secluded country road in southwestern Virginia, a Conservation Police Officer sat in his SUV and sipped cold coffee in the middle of an even colder night. It was late December. The drizzling rain had stopped and the temperature had dropped, making a miserable night even more so. The officer had received a complaint from a landowner that someone had been seen spotlighting deer on his property. He noticed headlights gradually coming into view.

In this remote part of Virginia, most people were early-to-bed and early-to-rise and rarely did he see a car after midnight. He noted the two-tone pickup truck as it slowly drove by. The CPO was well hidden, and both occupants in the truck were focusing on the field across from where he was parked. A few minutes later, headlights appeared again. It was the same truck. It slowed a bit, then crept forward, then stopped. Suddenly, a large light shone onto the field.

Instantly, the officer switched on his ignition and flashing lights. In the glare of his headlights, he could see the driver had a dumbfounded look on his face. The CPO waited in his car for a few seconds and watched the driver's face closely. He knew instinctively what the driver was thinking and he hoped the driver wasn't foolish—or desperate—enough to try to escape. This was the difficult part of a CPO's job. Was he dealing with just plain stupidity or a violator with a criminal history who might try anything to prevent an arrest?

Not everything is high drama in the day and night of a Virginia Conservation Police Officer—still known in some parts as Game Wardens. But Virginia's CPOs are the ones on the front lines. It is their responsibility to enforce conservation game laws and provide for public safety. Aside from checking boating, fishing, and hunting licenses, what CPOs do in the daily performance of their jobs is pretty much a guess to most. In reality, a great deal of time is spent in surveillance, evidence gathering, investigations, court preparation, and lots of paperwork. However,

CPOs will be the first to admit that just because you have done all these things to the best of your ability to present your case, don't expect that things will go your way. Physical proof of a crime does not mean a conviction.

A recent case, which was handled by Virginia Conservation Police Officers Josh Wheeler and Tony McFaddin, demonstrates just how complex achieving justice can be. "We received a tip from someone in the bear hunting community that they had learned of somebody killing an underweight bear. I should point out, first thing, that it is very helpful when we have hunters who want to do things the right way and assist us with leads and other information," noted CPO Wheeler. For those who are not bear hunters, it may be helpful to know that in Virginia, an underweight bear is any bear taken weighing 99 pounds or less. It must weigh 75 pounds or greater if it is dressed out when checked in. To put things in perspective, it is not unusual for a Labrador retriever to weigh 100 pounds. The size of the reported underweight bear killed turned out to be approximately 17 pounds—the size of a cocker spaniel—in

other words, a bear cub. Wheeler learned that there may have been other cubs with the mother. He pointed out that cubs so young may not have been old enough to learn how to forage for themselves and therefore may starve or become food for larger predators.

"We were able to get a name, and through the use of our database, we were able to get a location of the suspect," explained Wheeler. "After a little more research, I visited the home of the suspect. I pretty much knew where to find him but wanted to be one hundred percent sure of my information before I went to his house. At first he denied even killing a bear, much less a bear cub, but it turned out he not only had killed the cub but the sow (female) with it as well." Wheeler continued, "In his written statement, he said that he saw the sow at a distance of 75 yards, and in his opinion it acted aggressively when it saw the shooter and stood up. So he shot the mother bear. He stated the cub must have been on the mother's back when he shot, so it was a one-shot, two-killed scenario."

Fast-forward a ways and a CPO learns that time and a defendant with a lawyer may change things—even though the shooter has already admitted to shooting a bear out of season. "A couple of days before the trial, we met with the defense attorney and the shooter's story had changed from his written testimony," related Wheeler. "He is now claiming that the bear was only 35 yards away and charging towards him with the cub holding onto the sow's back. Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney Christopher Billias, who was representing us, felt it very important that both Tony and I know specific answers to specific questions about bears and bear behavior. Virginia's CPOs have various degrees of wildlife knowledge, but we did not have the knowledge to answer certain specific questions about bears, under oath."

It turns out that a great many people do not have a wealth of knowledge about bear behavior, nor do they know that black bears (the only bear native to Virginia) and grizzly bears react differently to humans. A person encountering one may need to react differently as well. As CPO Wheeler pointed out, "There are a number of things we have all heard about bears in stories or seen in movies, that one generation passes to another, that is taken to be true, but is really not. We were very fortunate to have Jaime Sajecki, our

black bear project leader for the Department, assist us during the trial. She not only was able to come on short notice," noted Wheeler, "she came well prepared."

One of the things Sajecki pointed out was that a black bear standing on its hind legs when it sees something is not an aggressive motion. It is scenting the air to try to get a read as to what is out there. A human being sitting on the ground in the woods might stand up as well, if she heard something, and then start searching with her eyes. A bear's sense of smell is much stronger than its eyesight; therefore, it uses its nose to paint a better picture of what is around it. If a black bear senses danger, it will send its cubs up a tree. The paws and claws of a black bear are shaped differently than those of a grizzly bear, making black bears excellent tree climbers—even the adults.

As CPO McFaddin pointed out, "Jaime's expert testimony directly and instantly refuted the defendant's silly testimony that the bear was charging him with a cub on its back. I just don't think we would have had the same results from the court without Jaime's participation," said McFaddin. "She educated us, the lawyers, and the judge about black bears, and this knowledge that she provided helped all of us understand the difference between black bear facts and black bear myths."

Jaime Sajecki has been focusing on bears since 2001 and has been with the DGIF since 2007. When asked about the trial, she replied, "I think there were two important outcomes. One, all the hard work, evidence gathering, court preparation, and investigation paid off. Two, I think it sends a message to people who break the law and try to plead ignorance or just be untruthful that we have competent, intelligent people across the board and on our staff throughout the Department, who will work together with our attorney. It was good to see that the judge recognized the inconsistencies and that the defendant was not telling the truth."

Sajecki recommends Linda Masterson's book, *Living With Bears*, as a very good resource for learning about bear behavior and the dos and don'ts if you happen upon one. "I find that people really like bears and do not

CPOs have many tools at their disposal that help them enforce game laws. But nothing compares with a good tip offered by a neighbor or fellow sportsman.

want to see them harmed unlawfully. They may not want them in their backyards, but they do want them safe in the bear's proper environment," the biologist noted.

Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney Chris Billias had high praise for Sajecki. "She enlightened the court as to bear behavior, so that it was obvious to everyone the defendant's testimony was not probable." Billias also added, "We take crimes against wildlife very seriously in Rockbridge County, so if you are planning on breaking Virginia's game laws, you better do it someplace else!"

A CPO's job can be frustrating and dangerous, but both Wheeler and McFaddin enjoy what they do. Both stated the need for citizen involvement in helping to ensure respect for game laws. "There is a shortcut that helps us both become more efficient—INFORMATION," said McFaddin. "We need all the information we can get from landowners, sportsmen, and citizens in our community. With information, we do not have to randomly patrol around hoping we find a crime in progress. Too many times we hear about a wildlife crime months or years later. I hear, 'Well, I was going to call you,' or 'I know you are busy,' or 'I didn't want to bother you.' We are here to serve the community and to protect our natural resources. It is not a bother; that's what we do. Give us a call." ❧

*Clarke C. Jones spends his spare time with his black Labrador retriever, Luke, hunting up good stories. You can visit Clarke and Luke on their website at [www.clarkecjones.com](http://www.clarkecjones.com).*

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## RESEARCHERS HOPE TO BUY TIME FOR THE RARE SHENANDOAH SALAMANDER.

story and photos by Gail Brown

There's a drama playing out in the Shenandoah National Park high above the Skyline Drive. There are heroes and anti-heroes and characters that fall somewhere in between. No one knows what will happen, but some believe things will end badly. The area's history—the Shenandoah Valley, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corps, Stonewall Jackson's Valley Campaign—are so much a part of the story they could overrun the plot. But that's a risk worth taking, as without the big picture it's hard to appreciate the value we place on our protagonist, who is, after all, only a salamander—albeit a rare one. Here's the story: plot, history, coincidences, and all.

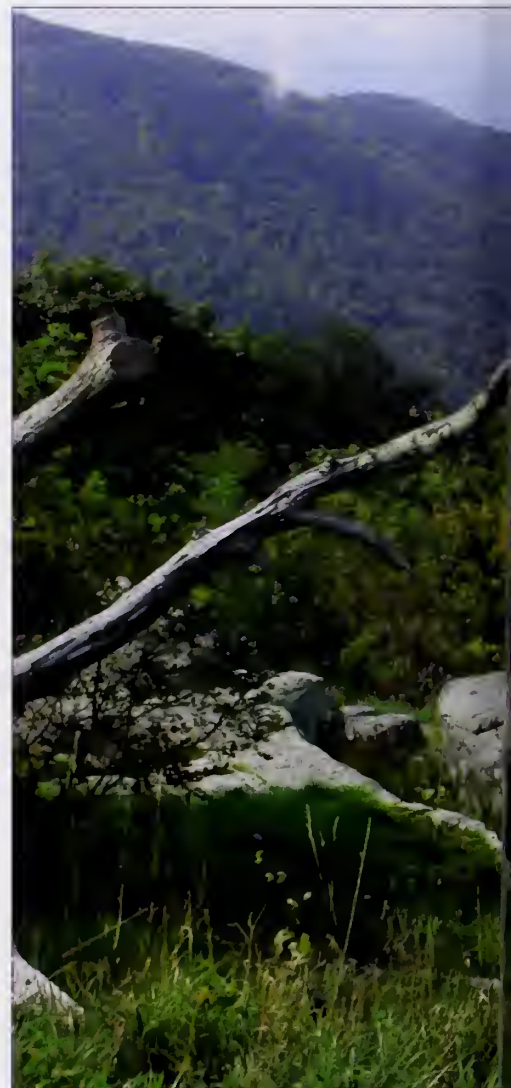
The problem didn't start on the tops of three of the highest mountains in the Shenandoah National Park, but that's where the Shenandoah salamander (*Plethodon shenandoah*) scrapes by today, either in the vegetative cracks on their north and north-western talus slopes, or under logs, rocks, and leaf litter in the surrounding hardwood forest. There, this small woodland salamander carries on with life as it has for the past 5 to 10

million years. Listed as state endangered in 1987 and federally listed as endangered in 1989 due to limited distribution, historic land use, and competition from other species of salamander, the Shenandoah salamander is found nowhere else in the world but on these mountains, and then only at elevations of 3,000 feet or higher.

One of 55 species of salamander native to Virginia, and one of three found nowhere else in the world but in Virginia, scientists believe a warming climate at the end of the Pleistocene period forced the Shenandoah salamander to retreat to these harsh slopes. Yet, flanked by the competition and stressed by climate change, the Shenandoah salamander, against all odds, continues to survive. But confinement hasn't guaranteed isolation or even protection for this amphibian, as people and progress simply continue to come to them.

# Saving A MOU

Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the construction of the Skyline Drive got things moving in the '30s. Trails, access roads, overlooks, and comfort stations created by the CCC with the opening of the Shenandoah National Park continue to bring the public, in ever-increasing numbers, to and through the salamanders' territory. But for the Shenandoah salamander, a lungless creature that depends on moisture to exchange oxygen and carbon dioxide through its skin, it is the byproducts of progress—air pollution, acid rain, and the consequences of climate change—that are far more serious issues than the enthusiasm of hikers enjoying the out-of-doors. While the establishment of the Shenandoah National Park offers unmatched protection to all of its natural resources,



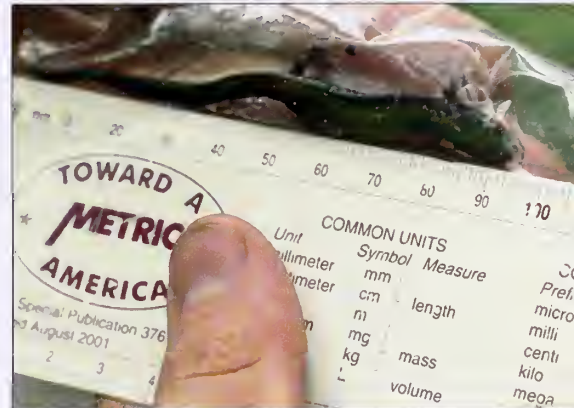


# NTAINTOP SPECIES

construction of the Skyline Drive may have divided the salamander population and reduced the gene pool. Similarly, construction of highways such as US Rt. 11 and US Rt. 81 through the valley has resulted in a negative impact on wildlife as well as loss of farmland and degradation of historically significant landmarks. Regrettably, many of the area's Civil War battlefields are buried under concrete, resulting in an economic as well as historical loss. In the Shenandoah, history, science, and economics appear inescapably linked, unlike in cities where either can thrive or die without consequence to the other.

This past year Virginians recognized three anniversaries tied to the history, natural resources, and ultimate economic well-being of our commonwealth: the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary

of the founding of the Virginia State Parks, the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Shenandoah National Park (SNP), and the Civil War Sesquicentennial. All were major events for Virginia and brought people from all over the country into our state. While many came to the SNP to hike in the presence of wild things, others came to the valley to retrace Stonewall Jackson's historic Valley Campaign, which is still studied today by military leaders around the world. Jackson's goal: buy Lee some time to reinforce defenses around Richmond by keeping the eyes of the federal government on the valley and the Union forces involved west of the Blue Ridge. Jackson's firm belief, "If this valley is lost, Virginia is lost," perhaps explains how he and his "foot cavalry" accomplished the impossible. Outnumbered 3 to 1, the



Unless at risk, salamanders are measured and weighed. The endangered Shenandoah salamander (below) is one of three found only in Virginia. The red-backed salamander (left) is numerous.







Sevín (center) with field technicians Kasey Ewing and Matthew Storer gather data such as depth of leaf litter. On-site data will help researchers understand the habitat characteristics where Shenandoah salamanders might be found.

Stonewall Brigade marched 646 miles in 48 days, striking where least expected and then disappearing through mountain gaps. Using geography and stealth to their advantage, they kept three armies engaged in a futile chase up and down the valley from March to June. In the end, tenacity paid off, Jackson beat the odds, and Lee got what he needed—time. Today, as the historical reenactments of 2011 draw to a close, a battle of a different kind continues, mostly unnoticed, under the surface on three unforgiving peaks in the Blue Ridge. Time and geography are still key.

Outside of Front Royal lies the northernmost entrance to the SNP and the Skyline Drive. Adjacent to the park, at the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute (SCBI), a team of researchers hopes to find answers in time to save the Shenandoah salamander. The team—Dr. Evan Grant, coordinator of the USGS's northeast Amphibian Research and Monitoring Initiative (ARMI), ARMI master's student Eric Dallalio, Dr. Brian Gratwicke, Smithsonian amphibian conservation biologist, and Jennifer Sevín, Smithsonian amphibian specialist—believes intervention may help, and the scientists remain determined to find answers before it is too late. The plan: determine the best course of action for management of the species and its habitat, gather detailed scientific information that can be used to inform management

decisions, and work closely with the Shenandoah National Park resource managers to implement an adaptive management program for the species. Jeb Wofford, a fish and wildlife biologist at the Shenandoah National Park, states: "With large-scale threats occurring, such as acid deposition or climate change, management and preservation become very difficult, particularly when the focus is truly on the long term. With the Shenandoah salamander, we hope that by learning how to conserve and manage this rare species, the entire mountaintop ecosystem will benefit." In a time when amphibians are being lost at an alarming rate worldwide, and considering their proven value to medical research, we help ourselves as well when we learn how to protect and maintain this species.

To that end, beginning in 2007 Sevín and USGS ARMI scientists monitored 124 study plots located in both talus and less rocky areas on three of the tallest mountains, focusing on the animals' distribution, abundance, and habitat use. Each site was visited up to three times, both day and night, during spring, summer, and fall. A nocturnal animal, the best time to see the Shenandoah salamander is on rainy nights when they come out to forage for other invertebrates and insects such as flies, mites, or springtails. Sevín gathered extensive on-site data on air temperature, number of days since the last rainfall, the

amount of moisture on rocks and other surfaces, relative humidity, depth of leaf litter, dominant tree species and canopy cover, distances from roads and trails, and type of talus present. Unless there was a risk to the animal, salamanders were captured, measured, and weighed. DNA samples were also taken to determine if hybridization is occurring with *P. cinereus*, the red-backed salamander. Research indicates this does not appear to be happening on a large scale. In August 2008, Sevín and her field technicians became the first to uncover a nest with six Shenandoah salamander eggs, two hatchlings, and a mother protecting them. "After turning thousands of rocks and always hoping to find a nest site, it was absolutely amazing to see," reported Sevín. "The most interesting observation was the mixture of striped and unstriped morphs in the same clutch." Persistence paid off.

Now what is needed is time: time to learn if these salamanders are susceptible to chytridiomycosis (chytrid fungus, a deadly skin disease which is killing amphibians worldwide), time to understand the consequences of acid deposition and the resulting changes in the hydrochemical conditions within the soil, and time to study the effects of defoliation, which occurred on a large scale when the woolly adelgid attacked the park's hemlocks and the



John (JD) Kleopfer, a biologist with DGIF, uses a Snake Eye remote camera to help locate these small woodland salamanders. Right, Jeb Wofford, SNP biologist, checks out a data logger set to record air temperature and relative humidity.



gypsy moth destroyed the oak canopy, preventing amphibians from getting the shade and cooler temperatures they need. Time is needed to uncover additional information about the species' history of which, until recently, so little has been known. To that end, the National Park Service, Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, University of Virginia, and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries are pooling resources and working together to learn about and conserve this species. Answers need to be found, and found soon, if scientists are to implement their recovery plan.

At this time, the University of Virginia's Dr. Stephen de Wekker (Department of Environmental Science), along with PhD student Temple Lee in cooperation with the National Park Service and SCBI and ARMI, are collecting data that will help make predictions as to how landscape factors influence temperature and relative humidity on the mountain. The ultimate goal—to determine how the Shenandoah salamander may respond to future climate change—will help scientists learn how to better protect all species. This research provides a foundation for reasonable hope, but there are no guarantees, especially as it is climate change that has been identified as one of the salamanders' main threats. Only one thing is sure: If this salamander is lost, part of Virginia's heritage will disappear—forever.

While the challenge is great and the outcome questionable, those quick to write off these tiny survivors might want to think twice. On this same ground, on a far greater scale, over 150 years ago, few believed 18,000 men could keep 60,000 well-supplied troops on the run throughout a cold, wet spring. It did not seem possible that half-starved men, many without shoes, could march up to 35 miles a day. Yet they did. In the world underfoot, where life-and-death struggles of another kind have been grinding on for 10,000 years, where retreat has ended on the top of the mountain, is there a chance the Shenandoah salamander can also beat the odds? Some point to the smog, convinced it's already too late. Others point to the salamander and see a tenacious survivor. Only one can be right. Only time will tell. ❧

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*Gail Brown is a retired teacher and school administrator.*







# Play it Forward

*Protecting hunting and farming “futures” on their land motivated this couple to choose a conservation easement.*

by Tim Thornton

**J**ack Leffel sat on his front porch and named the five mountains that defined the horizon: Mays, Purgatory, Sugar Loaf, Sheets, Rat Hole. “I have stepped on every foot of these mountains you see, grouse hunting,” he said. “I have permission to hunt it now. But that’s not going to last.”

For a long time, a timber company owned about 16,000 acres on Sugar Loaf and Purgatory mountains. But now that land seems to change hands every couple of years and Leffel is convinced that it will eventually be developed in one way or another, perhaps

reducing wildlife habitat and certainly restricting hunters’ access to the land. Leffel and his wife, Mary Lynne, have made sure one patch of Botetourt County farmland won’t sprout a crop of houses. Four years ago, the Leffels put one hundred eighteen acres that stretch for more than a mile along the James River in a conservation easement—though Leffel doesn’t like that term.

“I hate that word, ‘easement,’” he said. “It still makes me cringe.”

“Easement” suggests that someone has access to your property. And landowners “donate” conservation easements—so it sounds like they’re giving something away for nothing. But conservation easements essentially

trade potential development rights for tax breaks; tax breaks beyond what a landowner can use are available to be sold to people who can use them. Each agreement is negotiated on its own, so each deal is unique, but in every case the limits put on land use are permanent. So are the benefits, including the wildlife habitat that gets preserved. In the Leffels’ case, their land won’t be developed—which they didn’t want it to be. Their children will be able to inherit the property. Until then, the land will be used just as the Leffels want it used—hunting, some farming if they want, maybe even some timbering. Of course, Jack and his wife have differing ideas about how to use the land.





Sally Mills

During deer season, bucks are reserved for young hunters. Older deerstalkers have to settle for antlerless deer. Not that anyone has to do much stalking. Leffel has stands spread around the place overlooking likely deer haunts. And the antlerless restriction isn't much of a problem, since the farm is in the Deer Management Assistance Program, which allows a more liberal kill of antlerless deer.

Leffel says he's tickled with the way that things have worked out, but it wasn't easy to get here. He started investigating easements years ago, but gave up when he couldn't find answers to all of his questions. He started again when then-Governor Tim Kaine was pushing to protect four hundred thousand

*(cont. p. 15)*



Sally Mills



Sally Mills

"She's into bird watching," Jack said. "I'm into grouse hunting."

He's also into deer hunting and quail hunting and introducing young people to the outdoors. "As far as the education thing, we've got swamp; we've got wetland; we've got the river. Every ecological system that's in Southwest Virginia we've got represented right here," Leffel noted. "You could just make it a contiguous classroom."

"I'm really serious. I want to share it with the kids ... It's to get these kids, to let them understand that the real world of wildlife and ecology and environment is really not represented by Walt Disney. It's really not."

One of the things Leffel teaches is a love of hunting. He raises quail, keeping them penned to protect them from coyotes and other predators until someone wants to hunt. "I put out ten birds," Leffel explained. "You get to hunt ten birds. If you get three, okay. If you get all ten of them, that's okay, too."

Top, Jack Leffel peers out over the James River at the site of a lock (below) built in the early 1850s to control water levels.





## Conservation Easement Benefits

Easements are negotiated, voluntary arrangements between a land trust and a landowner through which landowners agree to limit development or use of their land in exchange for tax benefits. Because conservation easements benefit the public by protecting fresh air, clean water, wildlife habitat, and scenic views, the Internal Revenue Service treats them as gifts. Tax breaks are based on the easement's value—the difference between the land's market value before and after development restrictions have been added. A qualified appraiser determines what these values are. Each conservation easement is unique. One landowner's conservation easement may allow him to retain the right to build up to two houses per 100 acres, while another may prohibit additional houses but retain her right to timber some land.

- **State tax credit:** 40 percent of an easement's value can be used to reduce or eliminate a landowner's state income tax bill. The credit can be applied over 11 years. For instance, with an easement worth \$60,000, the state would give the landowner a tax credit worth \$24,000 (40 percent of \$60,000). Landowners who don't owe enough taxes to make that worthwhile can sell their tax credits. The going rate is about 80 cents on the dollar.
- **Federal tax deductions:** Easements count as charitable donations, so an easement's value can reduce the amount of income taxed by up to 50 percent for up to 16 years. Farmers can deduct up to 100 percent of their adjusted gross income. A landowner who makes \$100,000 a year and has an easement worth \$50,000 reduces his taxable income to \$50,000. Unless the legislation is renewed, at the end of this year the deduction will be limited to 30 percent of adjusted gross income for up to five years.
- **Estate taxes:** Easements reduce the market value of land, which lowers—and may eliminate—estate taxes. In addition, the federal government exempts 40 percent of the value of land in a conservation easement from estate taxes (up to \$500,000).
- **Real estate taxes:** Virginia law says property protected by a conservation easement automatically qualifies for that city or county's lowest level of land use taxation. If the city or county doesn't have land use taxation, then the law states that the government must take the easement into account when assessing taxes on the property. Typically, this has meant a reduction in landowners' property tax bills.

For more information:  
[www.dcr.virginia.gov/land\\_conservation](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/land_conservation)



acres during his time as governor. Kaine visited Leffel's farm and canoed down the James to film a commercial promoting Virginia's state parks on Leffel's river side. Dozens of organizations, generally called land trusts, can hold conservation easements in Virginia and they all have their own ideas about how easements should be organized. Leffel kept running into problems, in part because he wanted to allow his place to be cut into three pieces. He has three children. Many land trusts don't like dividing parcels because more divisions mean more landowners to deal with in the long run. There were other problems, too, but Leffel kept at it, looking for a land trust he could work with.

He even lined up some neighbors who were mildly interested in putting conservation easements on their land. If they all signed up, Leffel noted, about one thousand acres of land along the James River would have been protected. But the easement expert who came to make the pitch just didn't connect with Jack's neighbors. Before the pitchman was out of the driveway, they were asking him why he'd gotten involved in such a thing. It was, Leffel suggested, a failure to communicate.

"They come out here and they say, 'It's your duty to do this,'" Leffel said. "Well, you just don't go tell an old farmer that. That sounds good in an air conditioned room in Roanoke, but it doesn't work out here. ... I think the system depends too much on the guy who's got a ton of money and is strictly looking for the tax credit."

Leffel thinks that's a shame, because "It's a dag-gone good deal for the farmers. It's about like having your cake and eating it, too."

Eventually, Leffel found David Hurt, who was working for an organization called Conservation Partners. "Were it not for Conservation Partners, we wouldn't be having this conversation today. They stuck with this thing and they educated me a lot," he said. "If there were a PhD in conservation easements, I would have it."

Leffel calls Hurt the hero of this story. When other land trusts had turned Leffel down, Hurt suggested he try the Ward Burton Wildlife Foundation. The former NASCAR driver's foundation liked Leffel's plan, so Leffel's conservation easement was finally filed just two days before 2007 ended. And he's still happy about it.



©Dwight Dyke



Sally Mills

Top, leaving undergrowth and grasses to grow on large swaths of his land has improved habitat for upland game birds and other species. Here, scenic views of the James are now protected through the Leffels' conservation easement. Opposite, Jack plants sorghum (milo) in several fields. It is much cheaper than corn and offers good cover for ground-nesting birds.

"I could not be happier. ... I'm doing everything I want to do or would anticipate doing with the land," Leffel remarked.

The Botetourt landowner may have been able to do all those things without a conservation easement—though he may have done it with a little less money in his pocket—but, in that case, who knows what would have happened to the land after Leffel was gone? Now it's clear the land will remain good

habitat for game animals and the people who hunt them. And it's clear why Leffel stuck with it so long.

"Because, dag-gone it, I wanted to preserve this place," he said. "Bottom line, I'm tickled to death." ❧

*Tim Thornton is a Montgomery County, MD, writer whose work has earned the Phillip D. Reed Memorial Award for Outstanding Writing on the Southern Environment and recognition from the Society of Environmental Journalists.*





# Take an Ad

story and photos  
by Bruce Ingram

When fellow high school teacher Jackie Collins asked me last fall if I would take her squirrel hunting, I experienced a flashback. It was 1985 and I was a 33-year-old who had never been hunting. I contacted both friends and acquaintances, and no one would take me afield. The most common reasons for their refusals were that they were too busy or that there was not enough game on their various properties (or the ones they had permission to hunt) to share with a novice like me.

Recalling that bitter memory, I promptly told my Lord Botetourt HS co-worker that I would be thrilled to take her afield as soon as she passed a hunter education course. When Jackie did so, she again dropped by my room and further explained her reasons for wanting to learn more about this pastime.

"My husband doesn't hunt and two of our four kids, Abby and Josh, are really interested in the outdoors," she explained. "I think hunting would be a good way for them to learn more about the environment."

I told Jackie that on her first outing I would take just her, but on following ones we could include Abby and Josh. Here is how I approached the opportunity to mentor her.

## Hunting Clothes, Shooting Tactics, and More

When Collins, clad in blue jeans and a light overcoat, arrived at my family's Botetourt County home on a cold Saturday afternoon in mid-January, the first thing I noticed was how inappropriately she was dressed. Once again, as someone who didn't have a hunting mentor, I suffered a negative flashback to the time I went afield in jeans and a light jacket and a heavy November rain began to fall. By



# ult Squirrel Hunting



Left, stand hunting is a great tactic when afield in the January woods, especially if you have a squirrel call handy. Here, Elaine Ingram helps Collins move into shooting position.

main hunting tactics—stand and still hunting—and I explained how the bushytails' food sources influenced where these animals would be located. The white and red oak acorn crop had long since been depleted, but gray squirrels had been foraging where a red cedar thicket bordered a hardwood cove, so that's where we took a stand.

However, an hour of sitting resulted in no game being spotted, so I suggested that we still hunt through a pine grove on the other side of the property. Jackie quickly grasped the concept of slowly still hunting through the woods, and both of us later froze when a gray began munching on pine cones about 40 yards away.

For five long minutes, Collins and I inched toward the creature, closing the gap to

20 yards. She looked at me and I whispered, "Close enough. Shoot when you're sure you have a good shot."

Several more minutes passed. Jackie fired, the silvertail fell to the ground, she squealed, I screamed. I haven't heard that much racket while squirrel hunting since, well, since I killed *my* first squirrel. Our last lesson for the day was a demonstration on how to clean a bushytail, and Elaine shared a favorite squirrel casserole recipe.

## Flora and Fauna, Bringing the Kids Along

Inclement weather resulted in our having to cancel two more January days afield, but when the spring squirrel season opened in



"You did great!" Elaine tells Jackie during their shooting practice. The newspaper serves as an effective, and cheap, target—used here in front of an oak stump.

the time I returned to my vehicle, I was on the verge of hypothermia.

I explained to Jackie that cotton clothes were alright on sunny September or June outings for silvertails, but given cotton's propensity to hold moisture, it was taboo at any other time. The Spanish teacher then told me she had not yet purchased a gun and asked to borrow mine for the day. My wife Elaine tutored Jackie on where the safety switch on my 20-gauge Remington autoloader was and how to load shells and safely fire; the duo then headed out for a target shooting session. Jackie beamed when she recorded a number of pellets in the kill zone. Finally, Elaine showed Jackie how simple it is to use a bellows-style squirrel call.

Next it was time to venture afield on our 29-acre spread. Jackie and I went over the two





## Basic Checklist of Squirrel Hunting Gear

1. Polypro or other synthetic underwear from light to heavy
2. Camo clothing and blaze orange hat and vest
3. Shotgun and high brass No. 6 shells. I recommend a 20 gauge if an individual just plans to pursue small game. But if a person feels that he or she might eventually want to go afield for big game, a 12 gauge will be appropriate for everything from squirrels and rabbits to deer and turkeys.
4. Squirrel call
5. Seat cushion
6. Knife: a lockback or fixed blade with a sheath
7. Hearing protection. I always wear hearing protection when target shooting and hunting.
8. Audubon field guides on trees, birds, mammals, among others:  
<http://marketplace.audubon.org/products/Audubon%20Books>
9. DGIF's video, "Squirrel Skinning Quick and Easy":  
[www3.dgif.virginia.gov/estore/proddetail.asp?prod=VW255](http://www3.dgif.virginia.gov/estore/proddetail.asp?prod=VW255)

June, Jackie, seventh grader Abby, and first grader Josh came along for an outing. First, Jackie showed them how mama loads a 20 gauge, and then I made the day's major announcement: "Let's go eat some squirrel food!"

The kids looked dubious but when I brought them in turn to a raspberry thicker and a trio of mulberry trees, all of us found "squirrel food" to be quite tasty. We subsequently checked out patches of May apples and gooseberries, and I explained that both menu items were unpalatable to wild animals and humans.

It was then that the most exciting event of the June morning occurred. Josh spotted a squirrel moving across the forest floor, and right behind the animal was a turkey hen and her poults. Obviously, no shot was possible,





Jackie and Abby Collins make note of a mulberry tree that the author has pointed out. Mulberries are a classic menu item for squirrels in June.

so for the next ten minutes we listened intently to turkey talk.

I next explained to everyone that we would ease out of the area so we wouldn't disrupt the activities of the mother hen and her young offspring. We were venturing to another part of the property to do some tree and songbird identification. On the way, we encountered a turkey dusting bowl, and I discussed how turkeys coat themselves with dust so as to lessen the aggravation from mites and other parasites.

Abby was fascinated that birds such as phoebes and Eastern wood peewees sing their own names (fee-be and pee-weeee, respectively), that a male scarlet tanager sings like a robin with a sore throat, that tufted titmice

and Carolina chickadees are birds of a different feather that flock together, and that two species of white (white, chinquapin) and three species of red (Northern red, scarlet, black) oaks live on such a small spread and that squirrels eat all of their acorns come autumn. Josh requested more squirrel food—a demand easily granted. Finally, I gave Abby a homework assignment to google up all the birds we saw and heard that day and report back to me on what she learned.

A week later, Abby, Josh, and Jackie returned for a late evening hunt, and Josh was dismayed to learn that the raspberry and mulberry crops had both been consumed. I explained that this was the natural order of things, that wineberries and blackberries would soon be ripening, and that forest foragers like squirrels would find other things to consume.

The four of us then spent the evening stand and still hunting, in turn, through the woods. I showed them how to bark like a bushytail—a skill that Abby proudly mastered but which caused Jackie and Josh to gag and all of us to laugh. As storm clouds began to roll in, a yellow-billed cuckoo began doing its cuke-cuke-cuke call and a

gray tree frog commenced trilling. These are signs, I told everyone, that pioneer folks correctly believed made a thunderstorm imminent.

For our two June squirrel hunts, we glimpsed a grand total of one squirrel, but Jackie glowed when both children asked me if they could come with mama when squirrel season resumed in September. Of course I said yes and, given Abby's curiosity about snakes, I gave her another homework assignment: research the two kinds of poisonous snakes (timber rattlers and copperheads) that are found in western Virginia and the four species of turtles that dwell in Botetourt (box, snapping, painted, and stinkpot). I also hinted that on our next excursion we might forage for two of my favorite autumn squirrel foods: wild black walnuts and mockernut hickory nuts.

Forager or not, consider taking an adult squirrel hunting next year. Or even better, take an entire family afield. Virginia's outdoors is a marvelous place for folks of any age. ❧

*Bruce Ingram has authored guide books on the James, New, Shenandoah and Rappahannock and his latest book is Fly and Spin Fishing for River Smallmouths. For more information, contact him at [be\\_ingram@juno.com](mailto:be_ingram@juno.com).*



Josh, Jackie, and Abby Collins stand hunt on the last day of the June squirrel season.



# INCIDENT OF THE



DGIF

by Travis McDaniel

**T**he five-mile drive from our rental house at Sandbridge on the low tide had been a pleasant one. I dropped the Jeep pick-up into granny-low and made a ninety-degree turn into the loose sand and up into the dunes on the entrance “road” into the Back Bay Wildlife Refuge headquarters. I paused on the crest of the dunes to take in the mesmerizing view. North and south was the unique strand of barrier islands known as the Great Outer Banks. Westward was Back Bay with its protected coves and marsh islands teeming with swans, geese and ducks by the thousands. Eastward, the vast Atlantic. A brisk northeaster was blowing and the temperature, near freezing.

It was December of 1960. I was fresh out of college and had been in my assistant manager position for less than five months. I had been working seven days a week from “can’t till can’t,” and it was getting old. The refuge manager, Carl Yelverton, had failed to tell me to report for work an hour before sunup, as I had done every day since the beginning of Virginia’s waterfowl season, so I took full advantage of the lapse and chose to come to work at a reasonable eight o’clock.

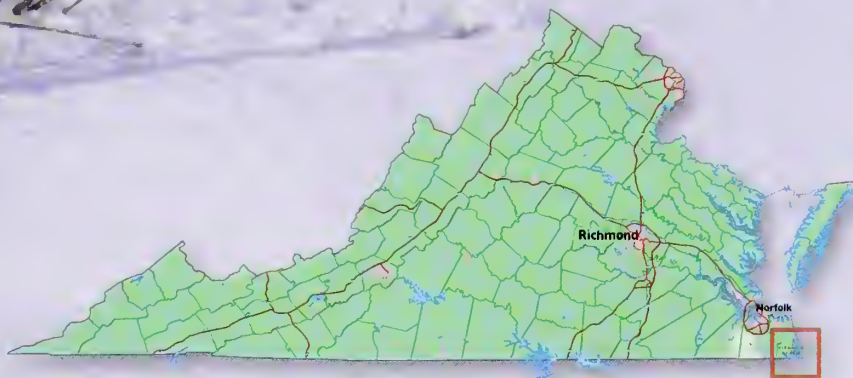
Knowing I had to face Carl sooner than later, I drove the last few hundred yards down the backside of the dunes into headquarters—site of the famous Back Bay Duck Hunting Club of the previous century. After washing the salt and sand off the pick-up, I strolled into the office as if it were any other workday. Carl reacted like I expected, only a lot worse.

It took a few minutes for him to cool down, and then he said, “You stay in the office today and get all this paperwork done. I’ll be out on the bay doing your job.”

With that he picked up his thermos of coffee, grabbed the spotting scope and binoculars, put on his cut-off hip boots and heavy coat, and stormed out in a huff.

I waited a couple of minutes and went out into the garage where maintenance man Rommie Waterfield, our third employee, was working. We watched as Carl pulled out of





the boathouse in the twin-outboard powered cabin boat, *Honker*, and headed toward Redhead Bay.

"What's bothering him?" Rommie asked.

"He's mad about me not being in the marsh watching hunters at 5 this morning. At least there won't be anyone to bug me when I have to check the manuals to figure out how to do these endless government reports."

Rommie and I later lunched in the garage, with me prodding him to tell more stories of the market hunting days of his father's era—when their only means of getting ducks and geese to markets in Norfolk was a two-day round trip by horse and wagon. And also of his own youth spent in the same Spartan conditions in the remote beach community of Wash Woods, and of his father's chidings when young Rommie wasted the cost of a shotgun shell by missing a Canada goose intended for the pot.

We were on the Game and Fish Commission's radio frequency, and I heard plenty of traffic between wardens all day, but nary a peep out of Carl. Intermittent rain and sleet came and went. The temperature continued to fall. It was late when I finished in the office and went outside to talk with Rommie.

"Heard anything from Carl?" he asked.

"Not a word. What do we do?"

Rommie rubbed his arms briskly, looked out at the bay, and said, "It's getting colder. Wouldn't be surprised if the bay freezes. Let's hang around until we know something."

"Looks like he'd have radioed if he had trouble," I said.

"You know Carl. He'd rather lose an arm than ask for help.

(cont. p. 23)



Map courtesy of Lenee Pennington. Background image ©Dwight Dyke





©Travis McDaniel



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FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE AREA

Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge  
1324 Sandbridge Rd.  
Virginia Beach, VA 23456  
(757) 301-7329

[www.fws.gov/backbay/index.html](http://www.fws.gov/backbay/index.html)

Includes detailed maps of trails and hunting zones, information on habitat improvements, an events calendar, and much more.

Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail, Coastal Trail  
[www.dgif.virginia.gov/vbwt/loop.asp?trail=1&loop=CSY](http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/vbwt/loop.asp?trail=1&loop=CSY)

Princess Anne Wildlife Management Area  
[www.dgif.virginia.gov/wmas/detail.asp?pid=8](http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wmas/detail.asp?pid=8)

False Cape State Park  
[www.dcr.virginia.gov/state\\_parks/fal.shtml](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state_parks/fal.shtml)

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Carl's wife, Kate, came running out of the house about dark, hollering that she had heard Carl on the radio monitor calling us. We rushed into the office and called Carl back on the base unit.

"Back Bay Base to Back Bay 17! Carl, where are you?"

A barely audible voice, reminiscent of a cold child with a quivering chin, responded. He didn't go into much detail, just something about a trotline which fouled the boat's propellers, and that he was aground on a sandbar off the Wash Flats.

We sent Kate for a thermos of hot coffee while Rommie and I collected our rescue gear. After putting on heavy coats, hip boots, and foul-weather gear, we were ready.

"You take the wheel," Rommie said.

I snapped back, "You're not in the Marines any more, Rommie. Carl made me your supervisor but that doesn't mean I know more than you. You know every cove, sandbar, and marsh point from here to Currutuck Sound. You get behind the wheel. I'll untie the boat."

He didn't argue.

Once clear of the boathouse, Rommie throttled the 35-hp Johnson up as fast as he dared. The bay was choppy, and the sixteen-foot speedboat had no windshield. Each swell we hit sent water over the bow, drenching us. The spray froze on our rain gear, and our movements sent trickles of ice particles into the bottom of the cedar plank boat, like pieces of an icy puzzle.

"I can't see a thing with this spray hitting us in the face, Rommie. I don't see how you can tell where you're going." He never said a word, but I noticed a momentary half-smile before he hunched his neck down deeper into his coat, set his jaw and turned forward again, peering into the inky chasm ahead.

This was a classic market hunting area back in the old days. Every cove, island, peninsula, or indent of marsh had been named by predecessors of long ago. Historic names like "Mink Bank Bend," "Red-Head Bay," "Blue Peter Bay," and "North Point" told their own stories.

Carl said he was aground "off the Wash Flats, in South Bay." That was a big area to cover, but Rommie's knowledge of water depths and sand bar locations narrowed the search area considerably. When he finally

throttled back, I swung the flashlight in a wide arc. Carl flashed back, not a hundred yards away. I wasn't surprised Rommie hit it dead on the nose. First try too.

Rommie cut the motor and I tipped it up. We almost made it to the grounded boat before we drug bottom and hopped out. Carl quickly dismissed inquiries about his condition. With few words exchanged, we moved everything of value into the speedboat — binoculars, spotting scope, oars, and the heavy, two-way radio.

Pulling the *Honker* off the sandbar would have been easy in the daytime, but under these circumstances it was out of the question. If the bay froze thick enough and later broke up on a strong north wind, the *Honker* could be destroyed by moving ice. But we had no choice. We threw out the anchor and left her grounded there, not knowing if we'd ever see the workhorse of our three-boat fleet in one piece again.

After pushing off the sandbar we pointed the speedboat's bow northward toward headquarters and warm clothes. Carl was shivering and extremely chilled but refused to wrap up in the sleeping bag. But he wasn't above chugging the hot coffee we brought along.

After unloading our gear at the boathouse we headed for the garage and a relieved wife, bundled up and waiting in the cold for her husband. In the garage Carl leaned against the wall, pulled off each boot and

emptied out about a pint of chilled water. After that he told us how he had run the *Honker* over a trotline some fisherman had not marked very well with the required buoys. The twin outboard motors ground to a halt as the trotline fouled each prop. He described how he had tilted both motors out of the water and tried to cut the tangled mess free with his knife. Strong winds blew him onto a sandbar before he knew it. (I didn't ask why he didn't throw out an anchor once the motors were disabled and the boat began drifting.)

Once aground on the bar, the boat was much steadier and Carl was making good progress cutting free the garbled mess. Then he dropped his knife overboard! Desperate, he stepped into the shallow water to grope around for his knife. Unfortunately, this is where his favored "cut-off" hip boots proved to be a liability. It wasn't long before they were overtopped with icy water. By the time he gave up trying it was almost dark. That's when he finally radioed for help.

Carl was a man of few words, and he made no comments about the rescue. But to me, Rommie's calm demeanor and skill in finding Carl in freezing temperatures, during a howling northeaster on a moonless night was nothing short of heroic. ❧

*Travis H. McDaniel was a biologist and National Wildlife Refuge manager with the USF&WS prior to his retirement. He is now a freelance writer living in Big Canoe in the North Georgia mountains.*



Photo courtesy of Carl Yelverton





# Wild In The

by Suzanne Ramsey

*Blackwater Creek  
Natural Area draws a  
rich assortment of  
wildlife, right in  
downtown Lynchburg.*

**E**arly in the fall, a friend and I went for a run in the Blackwater Creek Natural Area, a 300-acre linear greenway located in the heart of the city of Lynchburg. We run there often, usually opting for the single-track trails that follow the creek from which the park gets its name.

It's an area that, if you're lucky and watchful, is a good place to spot wildlife.

That autumn afternoon, as my friend and I loped down the trail, likely chatting about cooking or simply enjoying the changing leaves, we were stopped in our tracks by a deer the likes of which we'd never before encountered in the park.

The buck stood to the left of the trail, no more than 20 feet away from us. We stared at him; he stared at us. We counted the points





©Maslowski Photo

©Suzanne Ramsey



Left, a runner enjoys the Blackwater Creek Bikeway. White-tailed bucks and does are a common sight in the park and throughout the city. To help control populations, Lynchburg participates in the Urban Archery Deer Season.

# City

on his sizeable rack. There were ten. I would later describe him as looking like something out of a Nature documentary: a stag with a broad chest and regal posture.

Then, with a bit of a snort as if to bid us farewell or good riddance, he was gone. And so were we, continuing our run and feeling luckier than usual to have the Blackwater Creek Natural Area virtually in our backyards.

The urban park is managed by the Hill City, and popular with both locals and visitors. On warm afternoons, it teems with runners, cyclists, walkers, and hikers. Sometimes it can even be difficult to find a parking spot at the Ed Page entrance on Langhorne Road, one of several access points to the property.

In addition to the more rugged—albeit nicely maintained—single track, the Blackwater Creek Natural Area boasts miles of paved and gravel paths. One of these thoroughfares is the Blackwater Creek Bikeway, an asphalt trail that is part of the greater James River Heritage Trail.

The James River Heritage Trail winds its

way through several parks managed by Lynchburg Parks and Recreation. After passing through the Blackwater Creek Natural Area it continues through the downtown historic district and across the James River into Amherst County.

The bikeway was once a rail bed for the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad, Lynchburg's first rail line. According to Doug Harvey, director of the Lynchburg Museum System, construction on the railroad began in 1850 and was completed by 1856.

The Virginia and Tennessee transported goods between Lynchburg and Bristol, Tennessee, including iron ore, coal, salt, grain,





©Maslowski Photo



This box turtle made its presence known at the park. Right, cyclists ride through a tunnel on the Bikeway, originally built for the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad



©Suzanne Ramsey

Top, this stunning cardinal is just one of many native birds that frequent the area. Trail work continues at this very popular urban park.

wheat, and tobacco. During the Civil War, it brought Confederate troops, supplies, and weapons, as well as wounded soldiers to Lynchburg hospitals.

"One of the coolest things around," Harvey said, is a tunnel built for the railroad in the early 1850s. The 450-foot-long tunnel is located a little more than two miles down the Blackwater Creek Bikeway from the Ed Page entrance.

Workers, mainly Irish immigrants and slaves, built the tunnel by hand—drilling with hand tools, setting off black powder explosives, and then digging some more, Harvey said. It was dangerous, sometimes deadly, work and "progress was often measured in inches per day."

In 1983, the railroad abandoned the tracks and deeded them to the city. The tunnel was eventually paved and outfitted with ceiling lights so that trail users could gain safe passage.

In addition to the natural area's historical significance, it is also part of the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail. This designation prompted a call to Thelma Dalmas, an ornithologist who has written a bird-watching column for the local newspaper for three decades.

I met her at the Ed Page entrance one February morning, and even if she hadn't introduced herself, it would not have been hard to pick her out of a lineup.

The former Longwood University biology professor wore a gray sweatshirt with "Bird Watcher" and several different species of birds embroidered on the front. That and the binoculars hanging around her neck were a dead giveaway.

After introductions, she handed me a checklist of native birds and off we went down the trail, the packed snow crunching under our boots.

Almost immediately, Dalmas set about identifying birds, as often by sound as by sight. "All birds have a number of calls," she said, explaining that sometimes a cardinal says "cheer-cheer-cheer" and other times "birdie-birdie-birdie."

We heard a Carolina chickadee call "fee-bee, fee-bee" and spied a red-bellied woodpecker high atop a tree. Dalmas said she heard the woodpecker, which "sounds like he's gargling his throat," before she saw it. "Once I heard him call, I knew he was going

to be up there against a trunk," she said, pointing to the top of a leafless tree.

Soon after that we heard a crow and a blue jay, and Dalmas identified a white-throated sparrow. Within an hour, and only a half-mile from the parking lot, I'd checked off more than a dozen different species on my list, many of what Dalmas described as passerines or songbirds.

The list included black and turkey vultures; red-bellied, downy, and pileated woodpeckers; blue jays; American crows; Carolina chickadees; tufted titmice; white-breasted nuthatches; American robins; yellow-rumped warblers; white-throated sparrows; Northern cardinals; and a red-shouldered hawk, which Dalmas declared the "best" bird spotted during our outing.

In addition to those we encountered on that winter morning, visitors to the natural area may also see (or hear) great blue herons, green herons, orioles, bluebirds, belted kingfishers, Canada geese, wood peewees, and other species.

With the exception of the ubiquitous white-tailed deer, the park's popularity sometimes "makes it hard to see wildlife," said Laura Rogers, director of The Nature Zone, a city-run nature center. Nevertheless, she said, foxes, possums, turtles, a variety of snakes, beaver, and even river otters have been reported. Invertebrates, on the other hand, are pretty much a guaranteed find, she said, adding, "Worms are cool."



One summer morning, Rogers and I went into the natural area with the goal of finding animals. As we hiked, she pointed out maidenhair fern, mullein, soapwort, spice bush, and wingstem. She knelt next to a Christmas fern. "I have to do this every time I walk past a fern," she said, pointing to the spores on the underside of its leaves. "This one is expecting. I know. It's a nerdy thing."

But other than a box turtle discovered in the first few minutes of our hike, we were having no luck finding animals. We did find a bone on the trail, however. It was about six inches long and possibly the remains of someone's chicken dinner. Perhaps humoring me, Rogers put it in her pocket, saying she'd identify it back at The Nature Zone.

A few minutes later I was deep in thought, wondering why someone would hike with a bucket of chicken, when Rogers said, somewhat out of the blue, "I'm a big fan of poop. Scat, if you're going to be scientific about it. I don't want to brag, but they sometimes call me the 'poop lady'."

Like the bone, Rogers said, you see evidence of animals more often than the animals themselves. Just after saying that, she stopped and pointed down at several sandy mounds, each no bigger around than a nickel. "Earthworm pool!" she said. "How exciting!"

Whatever your motivation, spending time on local trails is a great way to get to know the character of a place as well as the wild animals that, if not seen, are kind enough to leave clues about their presence. ❧

*Suzanne Ramsey lives and writes in Lynchburg, Virginia.*

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Blackwater Creek Natural Area is open from dawn till dusk year-round. Day use only; no camping allowed. For a map of the area: [www.recreationparks.net/VA/lynchburg-city/](http://www.recreationparks.net/VA/lynchburg-city/).

Additional information may be found here: [www.virginia.org/Listings/OutdoorsAndSports/BlackwaterCreekNaturalAreaandTrail/](http://www.virginia.org/Listings/OutdoorsAndSports/BlackwaterCreekNaturalAreaandTrail/) which notes, "Perfect for bicycling, skating, walking, and running activities. Within the 300-acre natural area is the 155-acre Ruskin Freer Nature Preserve, a plant and animal sanctuary. Maps and additional information available at the Visitor Center."

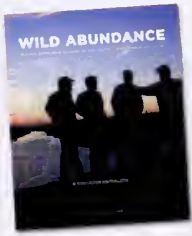
For information about the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail, go to [www.dgif.virginia.gov/vbwt](http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/vbwt).

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# AFIELD AND AFLOAT



## Outdoor Classics

by  
Beth Hester

### *Wild Abundance: Ritual, Revelry & Recipes of The South's Finest Hunting Clubs*

edited by Susan Schadt,  
photography by Lisa Buser  
2010 ArtsMemphis  
Color photographs  
\$45.00 Hardcover  
[www.wildabundancecookbook.com](http://www.wildabundancecookbook.com)

*"Avid outdoorsmen and women, conservationists and hunters embrace a brand of camaraderie steeped in tradition that inspires intense devotion to the land and wildlife, as well as the desire to share it with future generations. The special spirit of such excursions extends beyond the hunt and into the clubhouses and kitchens where memories are made."*

—Susan Schadt

Take nine of the South's most distinguished chefs. Match them with the cooks, guides, and club managers who, as Ms. Schadt says, form the 'soul' of nine eclectic hunt clubs along portions of the Southern flyway, and you get a compilation of unforgettable stories, photographs, and recipes that inspire and tantalize. This convivial, colorful book would be a treat any time of the year, but its emphasis on hospitality and the sharing of food, drink, and good times makes it especially well-suited for winter holiday gift giving.

Lisa Buser's photographs flawlessly capture the region's heartbreakingly lovely landscapes, the misty duck blind mornings, the gun dogs, and the club's comfortably appointed kitchens and great rooms where the décor is as individual as the stories and personalities of the people who are lucky enough to inhabit them.

I learned all about Mississippi's legendary and mysterious, secret ingredient: Hoover Sauce; I met the Swamp Witches, a duck-hunting sorority who haunt the marshes surrounding Ward Lake Hunt Club; I was given access to Emma Lincoln, and Mary

Frances Ingram's beloved hush puppy formula; I placed Post-its alongside recipes for Pheasant Pot Pie, Chargrilled Oysters, Crappie Two Ways, Fireplace Duck, and Blueberry Crunch. I also became absorbed in the personal stories of the cooks, guides, and club managers, their traditions, and the ties that bind. Best of all, proceeds from *Wild Abundance* benefit nonprofit organizations supporting wildlife conservation and the arts.

Immediately after reading *Wild Abundance* in its entirety, I came down with an acute case of hunt club envy and had to place a cold rag on my forehead. That kind of fever is hard to shake.



To learn more about *Find Game*, visit  
[www.HuntFishVA.com/hunting/findgame](http://www.HuntFishVA.com/hunting/findgame)



### ACROSS

2. Mint of genus *Monarda*
8. Shallow, artificial pond
10. Paid to use wildlife mgmt. areas
11. Paper for illegally taking wildlife
13. Red butterfly
14. Nostrum, nib
16. Deer amorous season
19. Surface H<sub>2</sub>O or buzz bait lure
20. Glowing fire cinder
21. Mape tree fluid
22. Light chestnut horses
25. Fishing gear
26. Set boat afloat
27. Four-winged insects
29. Water drainage under road or bridge
30. Large celestial night light.
31. Frozen skating surface
33. Tributary into main body of water
36. Dusk time
37. Attack with horns

### DOWN

1. Bison
2. Sunfish
3. Artificial water storage
4. Goal
5. Convert hide to leather
6. Boat water removal
7. \_\_\_\_\_ constrictor
9. Relating to night
12. Spherical celestial object
15. Eagle nest
16. Trash, debris
17. Disguised field attire
18. Periods 4 times a year
21. Small stream
23. Lacking animal pigment
24. Stripped land tract
28. Bow and arrow user
29. Anglers haul
32. Deer kill
34. Go towards
35. About, regarding

Marika Byrd is a freelance writer and photographer and a member of the Virginia Outdoor Writers Association.





Sally Mills

Dedication of the newest state forest and wildlife management area, Big Woods, took place on September 26. The 4,400-acre WMA will be managed cooperatively with the VA Dept. of Forestry and The Nature Conservancy. Shown here at the ribbon cutting, from L to R: Sussex County Administrator Thomas Harris; Virginia Department of Forestry State Forester Carl Garrison; Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries Executive Director Bob Duncan; Delegate Roslyn Tyler; Board of Game and Inland Fisheries member Curtis Colgate; Virginia Executive Director of The Nature Conservancy Michael Lipford; Dr. Mitchell Byrd of the Center for Conservation Biology at The College of William and Mary; and Brian Van Eerden, Director of the Southern Rivers Program of The Nature Conservancy.

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Total Distribution	34,343	33,146
Copies Not Distributed	244	854
Total	34,587	34,000
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### Do You Use a Wildlife Management Area or Fishing Lake?

Effective January 1, 2012, a Facility Access Permit will be required when using any Department-owned Wildlife Management Area or Fishing Lake. The permit is not required for any person holding a valid hunting, fishing, or trapping license or a current certificate of boat registration issued by the Department or for persons 16 years of age or younger. The permit requirement does not apply to Department-owned boat ramps or segments of the Appalachian Trail on Department-owned land. The Facility Access Permit fee is \$4 for a daily permit or \$23 for an annual permit and may be purchased online or at any license agent.

## Christmas BIRD COUNT



Dec. 14, 2011–Jan. 5, 2012

[www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/](http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/)



## RICHMOND FISHING EXPO

January 20-22, 2012  
Meadow Event Park  
Doswell, Va.

Friday: 10-8  
Saturday: 9-7  
Sunday: 10-5

Go to [www.ncboatshows.com](http://www.ncboatshows.com)  
for more information.

## Financial Summary: Fiscal Year 2011

Detailed financial information about the  
Department's revenues, expenses, and  
capital plan may be viewed here:

[www.dgif.virginia.gov/about/financial-summary/2011/](http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/about/financial-summary/2011/).

THANK YOU to our amazing staff across the  
Department who assisted throughout the  
year to bring this magazine to our readers.  
Many of you helped by writing columns and  
features, by reviewing copy for accuracy,  
and by catching mistakes (before we went to  
press). The magazine staff cannot do this job  
without you. Please accept our thanks and  
appreciation for your support.

—Sally Mills, Editor

## You Can Make a Difference

### HUNTERS FOR THE HUNGRY



**H**unters for the Hungry receives donated deer from successful hunters and funds to cover the costs of processing, so that venison may be distributed to those in need across the state. Each \$40 contribution allows another deer to be accepted. Hunters donating an entire deer are not required to pay any part of the processing fee.

The David Horne Hunger Relief Bill gives hunters the opportunity to donate \$2 or more to the program when purchasing a hunting license. One hundred percent of each donation goes to providing venison to the hungry. For additional information or to make a donation, visit [www.h4hungry.org](http://www.h4hungry.org) or call 1-800-352-HUNT (4868). Each of us can make a difference.



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## IMAGE OF THE MONTH



Congratulations go to Patsy Phillips of St. Paul for her  
beautiful and perfectly seasonal Image of the Month  
submission! Patsy captured this photograph in Russell  
County during an evening snowstorm using a flash to  
stop the snow as it fell. Nikon D40X digital SLR camera,  
ISO 1600, 1/60th, f/3.5. Happy Holidays!

You are invited to submit one to five of your best photo-  
graphs to "Image of the Month," Virginia Wildlife Maga-  
zine, P.O. Box 11104, 4010 West Broad Street,  
Richmond, VA 23230-1104. Send original slides, super  
high-quality prints, or high-res jpeg, tiff, or raw files on  
a disk and include a self-addressed, stamped envelope or  
other shipping method for return. Also, please include  
any pertinent information regarding how and where you  
captured the image and what camera and settings you  
used, along with your phone number. We look forward to  
seeing and sharing your work with our readers.



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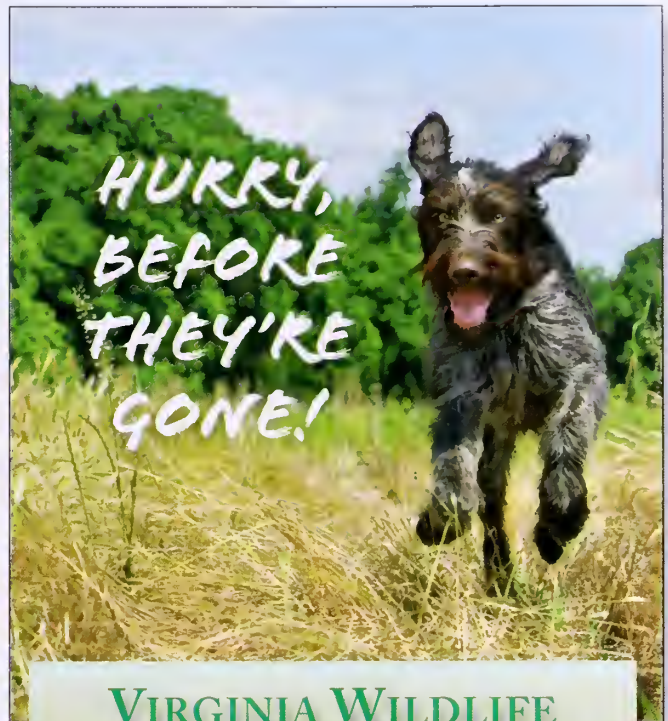


### 2011 Limited Edition Virginia Wildlife Collector's Knife

Our customized 2011 Collector's Knife is a Model 119 Special Buck knife which features a black bear. The handle is made from diamondwood with an aluminum guard and butt. Blade is 420HC steel. Knives and boxes, made in USA.

Item # VW-411 \$95.00 (plus \$7.25 S&H)

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Dwight Dyke

## VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

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Courtesy of Deanna Persinger

Congratulations to the Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Program team of Augusta County 4-H, who recently became National 4-H Champions! Team members are all home-schooled and have been mentored by two coaches as well as DGIF biologists Al Bourgeois and David Kocka. They studied all aspects of wildlife management and related habitats, including various marsh and wetland types. Pictured above, from L to R, Coach Doug Harpole, Meredith and Mark Persinger, Katie Fenneran, Trube Short, and Coach Jennifer Mercer.

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Ol' Jones and I had just returned from a day in a duck blind, wet and cold as usual, hungry as usual, tired and frustrated as usual. "You know, training you guys requires a great deal of determination. I can see we need to work on your being more steady to shot," he said, somewhat critically. "Did I ever tell you the story of working with my friend, Tom Diggs, and trying to teach my first Lab and Tom's Lab to not break at the sound of a shot?" he asked.

"Many times," I think to myself, but say nothing. I didn't have the heart to tell him that if he would shoot better, I wouldn't need a head start going after some crippled duck.

"Tom and I took our two Labs over to a secluded spot on the Swift Creek Reservoir. He also brought along his young son, Scott. I am guessing Scott was between 6 and 8 years old and full of enthusiasm about being with his dad and the dogs and taking a walk in the woods. Scott was having a high adventure and even brought his little bow and rubber-tipped arrow set along. He was great fun and full of ideas. While walking along an old logging road to the reservoir, Scott discovered a tortoise in the middle of the road. He ran over and picked it up and ran to his dad to show him his find and asked if he could play with it. Tom said 'sure' and asked what Scott would call it.

Without hesitation, Scott yelled, 'THUNDER!'

"I thought, 'What a great name! What tortoise would not be proud of the name THUNDER!?'"

Ol' Jones continued, "When we got to the reservoir we started working on keeping my dog steady by throwing bumpers into the water for Tom's Lab to retrieve. I would hold the leash on my Lab and yank him back and yell STAY! to try to teach him that he did not go for a retrieve when another dog was sent—or unless I gave him the command to do so.

Tom and I were so focused on our Labs that we sort of left Scott to his own devices and imagination. Meanwhile, young Scott had somehow lost all his arrows and, in the process, THUNDER had made an escape. Now out of ammunition and somewhat disappointed that THUNDER had departed without so much as a farewell, Scott was bored and wanted something to do. His father solved this problem by telling Scott that he would be a big help if he would hold his dog while we threw bumpers to my Lab."

"At the time, Scott was built a lot like me, when I was his age," Ol' Jones remarked. "He was thin, all legs and arms, and not an ounce of fat. A strong wind could have blown him away!"

It was at this moment in the story I looked at Ol' Jones's extra poundage around his waistline and extra chin barely hidden by a gray beard, and thought to myself that butterflies aren't the only things that go through one heck of a metamorphosis! Again, I said nothing.

"Tom felt very comfortable giving Scott this role because his Lab was better trained and more than likely would not break when we sent my dog. We stationed Scott about 30 yards behind us, hooked twenty feet of rope to Tom's Lab and gave Scott the other end of the rope. Our only flaw in this plan was that I should have been the one to throw the bumper.

"When Tom threw the bumper and yelled 'BACK', everything happened really fast and yet it seemed to play out in slow motion. Tom's dog broke! I saw Tom's dog fly by me, and I had just enough time to see Scott dig in his heels and anxiously waited at the end of his rope. The dog wanted the bumper—and Scott wanted the dog to stay put. The dog won. In what seemed a millisecond, Scott was launched into the air like a kite, hovered there for a moment, and then came sliding by me like a human sled in an Iditarod race—still holding tight to the rope—and being dragged to the lake! His father scooped him up just as he reached the water's edge."

Ol' Jones looked me in the eye and questioned, "So you see why it is so important to work on a young retriever's breaking?"

Perhaps, I mused. But I couldn't help but think that it was the young *human* who needed better brakes.

Keep a leg up,  
Luke

*Luke is a black Labrador retriever who spends his spare time hunting up good stories with best friend Clarke C. Jones. You can contact Luke and Clarke at [www.clarkecjones.com](http://www.clarkecjones.com).*



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# PHOTO TIPS

by Lynda Richardson

## Happy Holiday Gift Ideas!



How about a membership or subscription? There are a bunch of great photography magazines out there, including industry-specific ones like *Photo District News*, which also goes by PDN. You can purchase a hard copy subscription of this monthly magazine for \$65 or an online-only subscription for \$45. PDN is an incredible source of information for the professional photographer interested in all aspects of the business. Go to: [www.pdnonline.com](http://www.pdnonline.com).

Does your photographer use Photoshop or Lightroom software? Then



*The HoodLoupe works by shading bright light from the LCD screen so you can easily review your histograms and images. Photos ©Lynda Richardson*

**Y**ay! It's the holiday season again and I've been searching high and low for some great gift ideas to pass along to you! I figured if the suggestions were something that I'd want to receive myself (hint, hint), then these would also be great ideas for those special photographers in your life too.

If you know a Nikon or Canon owner, (I'm Canon—hint, hint) check out the Camera Lens mugs sold by Photojojo! These mugs look just like real lenses, and if your gift receiver isn't too annoyed when they discover it isn't a real lens, they will love this mug for coffee or as an eye-catching planter. Go online to: [www.photojojo.com](http://www.photojojo.com), from \$24–\$30.

Another great site for the unusual is BlueQ with their hip, earth-friendly bags and totes woven from 95% post-consumer material. Featuring images of vintage cameras, these cool bags are just plain fun! The camera-themed zipper pouches are \$5.99 and shoulder totes are \$14.99 plus shipping. Go to: [www.blueq.com](http://www.blueq.com).

I know I've mentioned the Hoodman HoodLoupe 3.0 in the past, but if your digital photographer doesn't have one I know they want one! The HoodLoupe makes reviewing images on an LCD in bright sunlight a million times easier. It covers up to a 3-inch LCD screen and has a lanyard and case for \$79.99. Check out this video for more information on this great product: <http://hoodmanusa.com/products.asp?dept=1017>.

Would you like to give the gift of your own photographs? Go to [www.richmondcamera.com](http://www.richmondcamera.com) where you can download your digital files and order prints, gallery wraps, holiday cards, mouse pads, photo books, t-shirts, mugs, key chains, and much more!

Another great site for utilizing photographs is [www.snaptotes.com](http://www.snaptotes.com). At Snaptotes you can have your images placed on well-made totes, messenger bags, clutch purses, wallets, and gym bags of various sizes and materials. Prices range from \$35–\$140.

maybe a membership to NAPP, the National Association of Photoshop Professionals, would be in order. NAPP is well known for its annual Photoshop World Conference & Expo and its magazine, *Photoshop User*. A membership will gain you access to thousands of online tutorials and retail discounts. One-year memberships are \$99. For more information, go to: [www.photoshopuser.com](http://www.photoshopuser.com).

I hope that this list will help you in your search for the perfect gift for that special photographer in your life. HAPPY HOLIDAYS!





# Dining In

by Ken and Maria Perrotte

## Royally Roasted Swan

Virginia is one of only three states with a season for hunting tundra swans. The tag for a single bird is won through a drawing, and only a few hundred swans are taken each year by Virginia hunters. Most birds are taken in the Chesapeake Bay's tidal tributaries.

Swan meat defies expectations. One might think it would cook and taste similar to a goose, but the reality is the meat—especially the breast meat—looks, carves, and tastes like venison or beef.

Swans are also deceiving in that the wing spread can exceed 7 feet, but the bird's body weight is barely above that of a Canada goose. The bird is mostly feathers, light bones, and a long neck. Like geese and many wild turkeys, an older bird can have tough legs and thighs. These can be slow cooked separately in liquid, or the bird roasted whole and then the legs sampled for tenderness. If they're too tough, separate them and put them in a crock pot with favored vegetables and some beef broth until they are tender.

Another point: Hand-plucking a swan is next to impossible. Some areas with smaller feathers may be "pluckable," but at-

tempting to pluck the whole bird is frustrating and, mostly, fruitless.

Swan was a centerpiece dish in many medieval royal banquets. The cooked meat was often served from a platter placed back into the hollowed, carefully positioned body of the swan. Along with a roasted wild boar, the ceremonial table setting was undoubtedly lavish.

Swans—mute swans anyway—were assigned royal status in 15th-century

England, meaning only royals could own and enjoy dining on them.

So, if you want to eat like King Henry VIII, try to get and fill a swan tag.

For this recipe, we roasted the whole swan in a browning bag. The breasts were juicy and tasty. The legs were "chewy."

½ cup table salt  
1 gallon cold water  
1 swan, plucked or skinned, about 6 to 8 pounds  
Cracked black pepper  
¼ teaspoon each sage, onion powder, and garlic powder  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
1 tablespoon flour  
3 or 4 slices bacon  
2 celery stalks, chopped into 1 ½ to 2 inch sections  
6 mushrooms, cut in half  
2 garlic cloves, coarsely chopped  
¼ small onion, coarsely chopped  
1 bay leaf  
2 ounces dry red wine

### For the gravy

Salt and pepper  
A dash of dry red wine or sherry  
Flour

Brining meat is easy and adds moisture, tenderness, and flavor. Simply add the salt and water into a container and soak the meat for about 8 hours in the refrigerator. An extra-large freezer bag works well.

Drain the water and pat the swan dry. Season with pepper and herbs. Rub with olive oil and dust with flour to help form a crust and retain moisture. Drape the bacon across exposed meat. Place in roasting bag according to directions. The brine and the roasting bag will inhibit browning, but the tradeoff of tenderness and flavor is worth it. Add coarsely chopped vegetables, bay leaf, and a tablespoon of red wine. Roast according to bag directions, about 1½ to 2 hours for an average 6- to 8-pound swan.

Remove from the oven. While the swan rests, strain drippings into a saucepan, pressing to extract as much as possible. Heat to a simmer and season with salt and pepper to taste. To increase the volume of gravy, you can add chicken or beef broth to the liquids. A dash of wine or sherry adds a nice touch. Thicken with a tablespoon or two of flour, dissolved into a little water, whisking it in slowly to avoid lumps. Serve the swan with the gravy.

A medley of vegetables, such as small red potatoes, mushrooms, and pearl onions, and cherry or grape tomatoes pan-seared with balsamic vinegar make a good accompaniment. Serves 6 to 8.





# Index to Virginia Wildlife

2011 Volume 72, Numbers 1-12

## BOATING

- Big Shoes to Fill, *Guess* . . . . . Apr., p. 33  
It's All About Choices, *Guess* . . . . . Jul., p. 33  
Pea Soup, *Guess* . . . . . Jun., p. 33  
Really?, *Guess* . . . . . Aug., p. 33  
That's All I Have to Say About That!, *Guess* . . . . . Sept., p. 33  
Understanding Marine Weather Forecasts, *Guess* . . . . . May, p. 33

## CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP

- A Call For Shark Conservation, *Funk* . . . . . Aug., p. 21  
A Paradise That Pays For Itself, *Funk* . . . . . Nov., p. 14  
Living With Wildlife, *Santiestevan* . . . . . Nov., p. 22  
Play It Forward, *Thornton* . . . . . Dec., p. 12  
The Migratory Bird Treaty Act: Its Origins and Impacts,  
*Hester* . . . . . Nov., p. 5  
The Resilient Brown Pelican, *Grey* . . . . . Aug., p. 26  
Tiny Turtle Looking for a Big Champion, *Santiestevan* . . . . . Apr., p. 18  
Trashing Wildlife, *Booth* . . . . . Jul., p. 23  
Unraveling the Mystery, *Santiestevan* . . . . . Aug., p. 12  
White-Nose Syndrome Leaves a Trail of Devastation,  
*Santiestevan* . . . . . May, p. 22  
Will Virginia's Birds Adapt?, *Booth* . . . . . Jan., p. 13

## FISH & FISHING RELATED

- 2010 Angler Hall of Fame & Anglers of the Year . . . . . Jun., p. 28  
A Day On The Bay, *Clarkson* . . . . . Jul., p. 5  
Beltway Insiders: The Trout of Fairfax County, *Hester* . . . . . May, p. 18  
Chasing Yellow Neds, *Trammell* . . . . . May, p. 5  
Clinch River Anointing, *Honaker* . . . . . Jan., p. 10  
Fly Fishing for Recovery, *Montgomery* . . . . . Oct., p. 26  
Fly Rod Chronicles, *Montgomery* . . . . . Apr., p. 24  
Haunted, *Mize* . . . . . Aug., p. 10  
Introducing Newcomers to Fishing, *McGlode* . . . . . May, p. 26  
Kings of the Bay, *Perrotte* . . . . . Aug., p. 16  
Me Gusta Pescar, I Love Fishing!, *Grey* . . . . . Jun., p. 10  
New River Cast and Blast, *Clarkson* . . . . . Sept., p. 26  
Northern Snakehead Is Here to Stay, *Montgomery* . . . . . Jun., p. 14  
Virginia's Family-friendly Fisheries, *McGlode* . . . . . Jul., p. 27

## HUNTING & TRAPPING RELATED

- A Duck Hunter's Dream, *Mills* . . . . . Jun., p. 20  
A Question of Ethics, *Hort* . . . . . Sept., p. 10  
Food Plots 101: Get Started, *Hort* . . . . . Apr., p. 5  
From Subsistence to Sport, *Badger* . . . . . Jan., p. 5  
From Subsistence to Sport, Part II, *Badger* . . . . . Feb., p. 5  
Hunting on the Edge of Uncertainty, *Clarkson* . . . . . Apr., p. 30  
Hunting Through History, *Byers* . . . . . Nov., p. 10  
Learning the Skills to Survive, *Brown* . . . . . Feb., p. 14  
Sea Duckin', *Clarkson* . . . . . Jan., p. 18  
Sport'n Dogs Go Global, *Jones* . . . . . Nov., p. 18  
Take an Adult Squirrel Hunting, *Ingram* . . . . . Dec., p. 16  
Where No Other Boat Will Go, *Clarkson* . . . . . Oct., p. 18  
Whitetail Biology, *Knox* . . . . . Oct., p. 30

## MISCELLANEOUS

- Annual Photography Contest Showcase . . . . . March  
At the Heart of Virginia Naturally, *Brown* . . . . . Oct., p. 22  
Clearing a Path for a Scenic River, *Thornton* . . . . . May, p. 10  
Corporate Habitat Program Reaches 10-Year Milestone,  
*Heiser* . . . . . Apr., p. 22  
Decoys as Investment, *Jones* . . . . . Feb., p. 24

- Incident Off the Wash Flats, *McDaniel* . . . . . Dec., p. 20  
Into New Terrain, *Ross* . . . . . Jan., p. 22  
Land of Solitude, *Shonk* . . . . . Sept., p. 14  
Oasis in Suburbia, *Montgomery* . . . . . Sept., p. 18  
Off The Leash, *Jones* . . . . . Jan./Feb./Apr./May  
Sept./Oct./Nov./Dec.

- Partnerships that Work for You, *West* . . . . . Jan., p. 26  
Raccoons, Rabies, and More, *Mojarov* . . . . . Oct., p. 14  
Short Hills WMA: Where Habitat Diversity Rules, *Ingram* . . . . . Nov., p. 27  
Tales From The Swans Gut, *Petrocci* . . . . . Oct., p. 10  
The Bear Facts, *Jones* . . . . . Dec., p. 5  
The Clinch is a Cinch for Fun Floating, *Ingram* . . . . . Jun., p. 24  
Wild in the City, *Romsey* . . . . . Dec., p. 24

## PHOTO TIPS/PHOTO ESSAYS

- A Really Good Tripod, *Richardson* . . . . . Feb., p. 33  
Before I Hit the Shutter I Should Ask Myself, *Richardson* . . . . . Apr., p. 32  
Below the Surface, *Richardson* . . . . . Jun., p. 32  
Eagles of the James, *Richardson* . . . . . Jun., p. 18  
Get Control of White Balance, *Richardson* . . . . . Sept., p. 32  
Happy Holiday Gift Ideas!, *Richardson* . . . . . Dec., p. 33  
Horizontal Horizons, *Richardson* . . . . . Jan., p. 33  
Mountain Splendor, *Riner* . . . . . Feb., p. 22  
New Categories for the Photo Contest, *Richardson* . . . . . May, p. 32  
Odd Numbers are the Rule in Composition, *Richardson* . . . . . Oct., p. 33  
Photographing Birds in Flight: The Basics, *Richardson* . . . . . Jul., p. 32  
Protecting Your Rights: Copyright and the Photographer,  
*Richardson* . . . . . Nov., p. 33  
Tips for Better Fishing Pictures, *Richardson* . . . . . Aug., p. 32

## RESOURCE MANAGEMENT/RESEARCH

- Are Eaglets Sending Signals?, *Booth* . . . . . Sept., p. 5  
Big Cats in Virginia: The Facts Ain't Lion, *Kocka & McShea* . . . . . Feb., p. 18  
Hawk Watching Across Virginia, *Mojarov* . . . . . Sept., p. 22  
Hope Flies On, *Bodger* . . . . . Jul., p. 31  
James River Sturgeon, *Jones* . . . . . Apr., p. 9  
Memory in Bone, *Dovis* . . . . . Feb., p. 10  
More Than a Memory, *Jones* . . . . . Oct., p. 5  
Offering a Second Chance, *Brown* . . . . . Jun., p. 5  
Of Grouse and Grizzled Skippers, *Ingram* . . . . . May, p. 14  
Rappahannock River Revival, *Beasley* . . . . . Jul., p. 14  
Saving a Mountaintop Species, *Brown* . . . . . Dec., p. 8  
Standing Up for Imperiled Fish and Wildlife, *Burkett* . . . . . Jan., p. 28  
The Foot Soldiers, *Hort* . . . . . Jul., p. 10  
Under the Arches, *Mojarov* . . . . . Jul., p. 18  
What is the Red Knot Telling Us?, *Booth* . . . . . Apr., p. 14

## WILD FOOD

- Confit of Upland Game Bird, *Perrotte* . . . . . May, p. 34  
Eastern Shore Fare, *Bodger* . . . . . Aug., p. 5  
Grilled Cobia, *Perrotte* . . . . . Jun., p. 34  
Hearty Venison Soup, *Perrotte* . . . . . Jan., p. 34  
Moose Noses and Road Kill—Must Be April, *Perrotte* . . . . . Apr., p. 34  
Skewered, Sautéed, and Seared—Doves are a Treat,  
*Perrotte* . . . . . Sept., p. 34  
Super Bowl Party Fare, *Perrotte* . . . . . Feb., p. 34  
Venison Barbeque Baked Beans, *Perrotte* . . . . . Nov., p. 34  
Venison Wellington, *Perrotte* . . . . . Oct., p. 34  
Virginia's State Saltwater Fish Two Ways, *Perrotte* . . . . . Jul., p. 34  
Wild Turkey Enchiladas with Salsa Verde, *Perrotte* . . . . . Aug., p. 34  
Royally Roast Swan, *Perrotte* . . . . . Dec., p. 34



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